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A brief plea for pre-evangelization

Abstract

In theological publications, postulations supporting a return to pre-evangelization are increasingly appearing on the horizon. This term indicates the need to precede the proclamation of the Christian kerygma with the proper preparation of potential recipients of the Gospel, so that they can openly embrace the message of salvation with their faith. Pre-evangelization is thus already an evangelization, albeit an incomplete one, for it lacks the direct proclamation of the Word of God. Nowadays, pre-evangelization serves to inspire people to reflect on their existence and on the role of faith in their everyday life. In addition, it is about promoting evangelical values that are simultaneously completely human.

In theologischen Publikationen werden die Postulate der Rückkehr zur Prä-Evangelisation immer häufiger. Dieser Begriff weist auf die Notwendigkeit hin, die Verkündigung des christlichen Kerygmas mit einer Vorbereitung der potenziellen Empfänger*innen des Evangeliums vorzubereiten, damit sie sich im Glauben für die Heilsbotschaft öffnen können. Die Prä-Evangelisation ist bereits Evangelisierung, wenn auch unvollständig, denn es gibt in ihr noch keinen Raum für die direkte Verkündigung des Wortes Gottes. Die Prä-Evangelisation soll heute Menschen dazu inspirieren, über ihre Existenz und die Bedeutung des Glaubens im Alltag nachzudenken. Darüber hinaus geht es um die Förderung von Werten des Evangeliums, die gleichzeitig völlig menschlich sind.

The Church is inherently an evangelizing community, which proclaims the uniqueness and universality of the saving mystery of Jesus Christ. She demands of believers in Christ commitment to continual proclamation of the Gospel "in season and out of season." Due to the changes taking place in social reality, the proclamation of the message of salvation cannot rely on the repetition of the same content in the same way as if the world remains the same, and mankind – instead of proceeding along the paths of history – stands still. Therefore, it is necessary to call attention to reality and all phenomena that occur, as well as to "anew recognized sensitivity" of the people of today and to discern, what their true spiritual hunger is.¹

For this reason, there are voices calling for a return to pre-evangelization. This term – often used before Vatican II and in the post-conciliar era basically ignored in the Catholic Church because of its absence in the conciliar documents² – comes back in the

¹ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Hacia una nueva pre-evangelización. Reflexiones para el Año de la Fe, in: Razón y Fe* 1379 (2013), 117–128, here 120.

² Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, London 2004, 44; Richard McBrien, *The Church. The Evolution of Catholicism*, New York 2008, 169; Francis D. Kelly, *The Mystery We Proclaim. Catech-*

area of theological reflection in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Today, the need to precede the direct proclamation of the Good News with appropriate preparation of the potential recipients of the Gospel to listening to it and acceptance of faith appears as an important challenge for pastoral theology.³ Although the legitimacy of the use of the term is sometimes questioned, it is worth addressing the issue of pre-evangelization, which defines part of the essential efforts serving the evangelization and is becoming more and more present in this area of interest to the Church.

For the sake of clarity, it is necessary to present first the meaning of the term "pre-evangelization" and then its reference to evangelization consisting in the direct transmission of the word of God. In addition, in order to fulfill the requirements of a plea as a defensive speech, arguments will be presented in favour of including pre-evangelization activities in the Church's saving mission. All this can be understood as an attempt to answer the question about the reasons of returning to the term "pre-evangelization" in theological reflection and in evangelization practice.

1. The characteristics of pre-evangelization

Pre-evangelization as a preparatory step to proclaim the kerygma is part of evangelization. It can simultaneously run with the complete evangelization (proclamation of the Good News of God who saves people) or precede it.⁴ The aim of pre-evangelization is to stimulate people's interest and make them ready to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The pre-evangelization is focused on the man and his existential situation.⁵ At this stage the Church draws her attention to human needs, the social situation and the shape of the prevailing culture in the society. Then the evangelizers efforts are concentrated on the influence of the environment on human beings and their experience, ideals and values professed by them.

Focusing on people and their problems and needs, believers in Christ who are engaged in pre-evangelization try to create an atmosphere of waiting for the direct proclamation of the Christian message of salvation.⁶ For this purpose they assimilate the concepts used widely by people, they get to know their social status, and also pay attention to the influence exerted on them by the environment. They also try to inspire

esis for the Third Millennium, Huntington 2008, 115; Paweł Mąkosa, *Preewangelizacja pierwszym i koniecznym etapem formacji chrześcijańskiej*, in: *Katecheta* 7–8 (2010), 25–34.

³ Vicente M.^a Pedrosa Arés, *Preewangelización*, in: Vicente M.^a Pedrosa – Jesús Sastre – Raúl Berzosa (ed.), *Diccionario de pastoral y evangelización*, Burgos 2000, 913–916, here 916.

⁴ Alfonso M. Nebreda, *Sessiond'étude de asiatique sur la catéchèsemissionnaire*, in: *Lumen Vitae* 4 (1962), 623–637, hier 630; Mąkosa, *Preewangelizacja* (An. 2) 26.

⁵ Nebreda, *Sessiond'étude* (An. 4) 631; Tacorda, Linda T., Alfonso M. Nebreda, S.J. (1926-) and the Missionary Problem of Pre-evangelization, Roma 1995, 48–49.

⁶ Stanisław Dyk, *Pre-ewangelizacja*, in: *Kieleckie Studia Teologiczne* 2 (2003), 102–111, here 103.

people to transform their mentality, showing them a deeper sense of reality and encouraging them to take an interest in spiritual life. At the same time they try to remove from the human heart barriers that prevent them from accepting the Good News of salvation in Christ.

Evangelizers must take care not only of the appropriate choice of words to make possible the transfer of the Christian message in an understandable way, but their ministry should be challenging for people to search for the meaning of life. Therefore, the aim of pre-evangelization is to call into question the safety based on the possession of material goods or disposition of technical instruments. It is about sensitizing people to the existence of the invisible, as well as about stimulating their readiness to accept the gifts of God. This is achieved by reflection on the phenomenon of transience and death and the existence of what transcends the technical possibilities of measurement that is the human ability of thinking, showing love and experiencing sufferings, and to assume responsibility for their moral decisions. Pre-evangelization wants to show to people that human reality and its various components (for example the choices made in conscience, social and economic development, spiritual aspirations) need a reference to another higher reality which embraces them and which is the redeeming love of God.⁷

In order to fulfill this task, Christians involved in pre-evangelization want to learn about contemporary myths, which are present in the every-day life of people, their fears, hopes and unmet needs, as well as their achievements and problems in their environment. Believers are open to relations of friendship with others, and ready to learn from them what is good and to share with them their experience. They make an attempt to give an answer to human needs for commitment to promoting justice, peace and universal solidarity. Such an involvement demands initiatives aimed at defending human dignity in milieus affected by poverty and social backwardness.⁸

Because of risks and needs appearing in human life, and prejudices and objections to Christianity emerging in some environments, dialogue plays an important role in pre-evangelization. For the followers of Christ, it creates an opportunity to contribute to the very progress of mankind. Dialogue encourages its participants to seek the truth and to confront their views with the views of other people. It helps to get knowledge of other religions, beliefs and philosophical trends, so that evangelization can be developed according to the principles of inculturation and thus the evangelizers can criticize these elements of a culture that cannot be reconciled with the truth of Christ,

⁷ Nebreda, Session d'étude (An. 4) 631.

⁸ A.-M. Henry, *Préévangélisation et prémission*, in: Gérard Mathon – Gérard-Henry Baudry – Paul Guilluy – E. Thiery (ed.), *Catholicisme. Hier – Aujourd'hui – Demain*, vol. XI, Paris 1988, 816; Françoise Darcy-Berube, *Religious Education at a Crossroads. Moving on in the Freedom of the Spirit*, Mahwah 1995, 41–42; Henry van Straelen, *Ouverture à l'autre laquelle? L'apostolat missionnaire et le monde non chrétien*, Paris 1982, 222.

and appreciate and integrate with Christianity what are not in conflict with Christian Good News.⁹

In pre-evangelization, the active love of followers of Christ plays an important role. This love is manifested in their generous immersion in the fate of the people living around them. The task of the faithful is to show people the love of God through their witness of Christian life. This is possible through the establishment of contacts with the environment by friendly help, good example and openness to closer relations. In this way, the faithful bring the truth of the Gospel closer to people through their attitude, although it is still not preached in words.¹⁰ However, they already show people the way to salvation, when the mystery of Christ begins to shine through them in the world. Then experiencing the generous love of Christians, people feel provoked to ask them questions about its source. This testimony of love helps in preparing people's hearts to receive the message of the Gospel, because it strongly attracts attention because of its humanitarian significance. The place for witness is not only in interpersonal relationships, but also on institutional level in schools, hospitals, hospices and social welfare centers founded by Christians.¹¹

In pre-evangelization, it is important that not only individuals give a witness of faith but also the entire community. Christians demonstrate to people living in their environment the way to faith in Jesus Christ, bearing witness to the Gospel in their interpersonal relationships in communities.¹² Especially important is the actualization of the biblical ideal of communion, which as a rule of life encourages Christians to create fraternal references, marked by mutual service and reinforced by common celebration of thanksgiving for the gift of salvation. Promotion of relationships within the Christian community should be accompanied by openness toward people living a distance to the Church and by hospitality towards all who are in need. Thanks to this attitude, people can see that it is possible in today's world to live according to the Gospel in such interpersonal relationships, which are an alternative to the impersonal treatment of human beings in modern societies.¹³

Focusing on human persons and their needs, the evangelizers don't forget that there is also in pre-evangelization a place to show the credibility of Christianity. Therefore the pre-evangelization underlines the value of apologetics, which presents rational

⁹ Dyk, *Pre-ewangelizacja* (An. 6) 107; Gerald O'Collins, *Living Vatican II. The 21st Council for the 21st Century*, Mahwah 2006, 187; Ryszard Hajduk, *Ewangelia na forum świata. Od apologetyki do marketingu narracyjnego*, Kraków 2013, 88.

¹⁰ *Ad Gentes* No. 12; Argiro R. Sierra, *La revelación según René Latourelle*, Roma 2000, 67.

¹¹ Domenico Grasso, *Evangelizzazione. Senso di un termine*, in: *Evangelisation, Dhavamony, Mariasusai* (ed.) Roma 1975, 21–47, here 30–31; Mąkosza, *Preewangelizacja* (An. 2) 27.

¹² Paul Hitz, *L'annonce missionnaire de l'Évangile*, Paris 1954, 180.

¹³ Ryszard Hajduk, *Evangelisieren durch gelebte Communio*, in: *Studia Redemptorystowskie* 11 (2013), 117–133, here 79.

arguments in favor of faith in Christ.¹⁴ Apologists involved in pre-evangelization have the task of breaking the barriers to the Gospel posed by today's intellectual currents. They should have a positive attitude towards human efforts to discover the truth and build a better world.

2. Pre-evangelization in reference to evangelization

To evangelize is to share with others God's gift of salvation, proclaiming to the world the Good News of Jesus Christ, who reveals God as love and communion.¹⁵ The Gospel is a message of salvation (cf. Rom. 1:16). It is much more than positive-sounding information. Its proclamation evokes in people deep commotion and reaction in the form of conversion, so it is the Good News that "makes things happen and is life-changing."¹⁶ The fullness of the revelation given to the world in Jesus Christ is contained in the Christian message of salvation. Through the words of the Gospel, Christ himself speaks to people, touches their hearts and opens them to the gift of God's redemption.¹⁷

In the stricter sense of the word, evangelization means proclamation of the Christian message addressed to unbelievers. Its recipients are "peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups".¹⁸ In the wider sense of the term, evangelization embraces the whole mission of the Church. In this perspective, it is the grace and proper vocation of the Church, an expression of her deepest identity.¹⁹ This concept covers the entire pastoral activity of the Church, orientated to the transmission of the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ and to the hope which has her basis in God's involvement in the history of the world. In this form of evangelization it is not just about verbal communication of God's message, but about transmission of the Good News by words and deeds, orthodoxy and orthopraxis.²⁰ In the full sense of the term,

¹⁴ Domenico Grasso, *Il kerigma e la predicazione*, in: *Gregorianum* 41 (1960), 424–450, here 434; Małkosa, *Preewangelizacja* (An. 2) 26.

¹⁵ Marcelo Azevedo, *I religiosi, vocazione e missione*, Milan 1988, 211; Avery Dulles, *Vatican II and Evangelization*, in: Steven Boguslawski – Ralph Martin (ed.), *The New Evangelization. Overcoming the Obstacles*, Mahwah 2008, 1–12, here 3.

¹⁶ *Spe Salvi* No. 2; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Volk Gottes und Leib Christi oder: Von der kommunikativen Kraft der Bilder. Neutestamentliche Vorgaben für die Kirche von heute*, in: Günter Koch – Josef Pretschner, (ed.), *Wozu Kirche? Wozu Gemeinde? Kirchengenerationen*, Würzburg 1994, 9–39, here 10.

¹⁷ Hitz, *L'annonce missionnaire* (An. 12) 86.

¹⁸ *Redemptoris Missio* No. 33.

¹⁹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* No. 14.

²⁰ Rolf Zerfaß, *Die kirchlichen Grundvollzüge – im Horizont der Gottesherrschaft*, in: *Konferenz der Bayerischen Pastoraltheologen* (ed.), *Das Handeln der Kirche in der Welt von heute. Ein pastoral-theologischer Grundriss*, München 1994, 32–50, here 47–48.

evangelization covers then all three stages: credible proclamation of the Gospel to those who haven't heard it yet, pastoral and religious maturation of believers, as well as revival of faith in the hearts of those who have almost lost it.²¹

Pre-evangelization means missionary activity, carried out through the hidden life of Christ's followers – their presence in public life, witness and sharing the fate of people living on their doorstep. All this is properly evangelization, or at least leads to evangelization. Without direct proclamation of God's Word, it already "makes present Christ" which is the fundamental goal of evangelization of the Church.²²

It can therefore be assumed that there are two phases of evangelization: pre-evangelization in which there is no possibility of the proclamation of the Gospel and akerygmic phase when the word of salvation is preached directly. It can be compared to the Old and New Testament, in which the same God fulfills the work of redemption. Activities of pre-evangelization are then part of evangelization, insofar as it demands them and completes them through the explicit proclamation of the truth about Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world.²³

Ecclesiastic documents present the development of the theology of evangelization from the understanding of the presence of Christians in the world as pre-evangelization to the conviction that their living witness is already an authentic proclamation of the Gospel. Therefore, it is sometimes argued that the use of the term "pre-evangelization" is actually superfluous.²⁴ If the witness of life is already evangelization, the Gospel is transmitted even though the name of Jesus isn't pronounced yet. Then, activities to improve the material standard of the poor are no longer pre-evangelization that is only a phase preceding the proclamation of the Good News of salvation, but the very evangelization.²⁵ It is a form of proclamation of the Gospel by deed.

Beside efforts to distinguish pre-evangelization from other evangelizing activities, there is a tendency to emphasize its specificity and inadequacy in comparison to direct communication of the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. Pre-evangelization is a preparation for evangelization and consists in involvement of Christians in the so-

²¹ *Evangeliū Gaudium* No. 14; Ryszard Hajduk, *Wierni świeccy w ewangelizacji kultury. Zasady i pola działania*, in: *Studia Elbląskie* XIII (2012), 227–244, here 229.

²² Henry, *Préévangélisation et prémission* (An. 8) 816.

²³ Grasso, *Evangelizzazione* (An. 11) 32.

²⁴ Santo Raponi, *Il carisma dei Redentoristi nella Chiesa. Commento alle Costituzioni*, Roma 1993, 149; Jacques Dupuis, *Jésus-Christ à la rencontre des religions*, Paris 1994, 296; Édouard-Charles Lebeau, *La santé au secours de la foi. Regards catholiques sur la psychologie humaniste*, Montréal 2001, 109; Roger D. Haight, *Christian Community in History* vol. II. *Comparative Ecclesiology*, New York 2005, 404.

²⁵ Konrad Gründig, *Mission im Wandel – ein neues Paradigma für Kirche und Gemeinde heute? Anfragen und Anstöße durch die Missionsgesellschaft Bethlehem (SMB) und die Bethlehem Mission Immensee (BMI)*, Immensee, Schweiz, Berlin 2006, 70.

cial, cultural and human dimension of daily life. However, it is accompanied by silence, which can lead to "muteness" of evangelizers. This danger particularly increases when Christians encounter various difficulties of a social and ideological character and they are invariably rooted in the belief that there are still no conditions to proclaim Christ directly. Fearing rejection, they give up the direct proclamation of the truth of Christ in expectance of more favorable conditions. However, pre-evangelization cannot be an excuse to give up evangelization. This attitude doesn't agree with the zeal of the apostles after Pentecost. They didn't wait with the proclamation of the Gospel until the people were ready to assume an appropriate disposition to accept it but they started proclaiming the message of salvation to the world without delay.²⁶

Pre-evangelization can therefore be considered as part of evangelization if we use this term to describe the entire activity of the Church. Pre-evangelization constantly maintains her specific form because it is evangelization "at its initial and still incomplete stage"²⁷. She wants to convince people to recognize in Christianity what is important for humanity on the universal level. She cannot "create" confidence which is necessary to accept the salvation that embraces the human individual, when God himself comes to meet him or her in the person of Jesus Christ.²⁸ The basic method of pre-evangelization is dialogue that leads to the openness of people to the Gospel, to the confrontation of human notions with God's truth and to the search for the deeper meaning of human reality. And the method of evangelization is direct proclamation of the Name of Jesus Christ.²⁹ The daily experiences and efforts of man, his desires, problems and concerns are the content of pre-evangelization and the subject of evangelization is the kerygma. Evangelization is thus a proclamation of revealed truths to the people, and pre-evangelization links to things rationally knowable.³⁰ The aim of pre-evangelization is the human disposition to accept the Gospel and the goal of evangelization – conversion of hearts. In pre-evangelization the interest of Christians focuses on what can be accepted and shared by all people of good will: the absolute value of the human person, the defense of life, the primacy of truth, the importance of unity in the family and giving meaning to human life as to death. Evangelization transmits a call to faith in Jesus Christ – the only Redeemer of man and to inclusion into the life of the Church.

²⁶ Straelen, *Ouverture à l'autre laquelle?* (An. 8) 222.

²⁷ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* No. 51

²⁸ Richard B. Ramsay, *Certeza de la fe. La defensa del Evangelio en un mundo inseguro*, Barcelona 2008, 142.

²⁹ Maria C. Carnicella, *Comunicazione ed evangelizzazione nella Chiesa*, Torino 1998, 82.

³⁰ Ramsay, *Certeza de la fe* (An. 28) 131.

3. The reasons for pre-evangelization in contemporary era

Although it may sometimes seem that pre-evangelization is not a fashionable term today, however, there are also voices postulating appreciation of pre-evangelization, and therefore a greater concern for preceding the direct proclamation of the Good News with appropriate preparation of the potential recipients of the Gospel to listening and acceptance in faith.³¹ It is motivated by the situation in which the contemporary Church is performing her mission in the "traditionally Christian" countries. There are entire groups of the baptized which "have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel".³² Preaching the Gospel to such people is considered as part of the "new evangelization" or "re-evangelization", so it is necessary first to help them to discover their spiritual needs and awaken the desire to satisfy them. Only then it is possible to talk to them about salvation in Jesus Christ with the hope that the Christian Good News will be accepted by them.

So therefore there are pedagogical reasons which become more important especially when the "spirit of the times" makes difficult to accept the faith. In modern times, a boundless confidence in technological progress as well as the disappearance of a sense of guilt in the hearts of many people, and loss of consciousness of the domination of sin in their lives aren't conducive to transferring the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.³³ Without adequate preparation of listeners for acceptance of the Gospel proclamation of God's Word, it would be understood by them as a collection of legends and call for the practice of folk customs. In this context, pre-evangelization plays an important role as an inspirational human activity bearing conversion of thinking about life and the world, as well as an opportunity to clarify the key concepts of Christianity and to draw the attention of people to the role of faith in daily life.

So understood pre-evangelization seems to be similar to marketing activities that is based on knowledge of human needs and motivations. To gain their favour and interest in buying particular products, it is not enough to convince people of a high quality of offered articles. People are not interested in products, but they are looking for solutions to their problems. For this reason, marketers first try to help potential customers to be aware of what their need is and that isn't possible to cope. Then they can subsequently suggest their solution in form of the purchase of a specific product.³⁴ The error that the Church sometimes commits in her activities is the exclusive

³¹ Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*. Catholic Social Teaching, New York 2012, 223.

³² *Redemptoris Missio* No. 33.

³³ *Spe Salvi* No. 30; Hitz, *L'annonce missionnaire* (An. 12) 180; Grasso, *Il kerigma e la predicazione* (An. 14) 433.

³⁴ Claudia Hilker, *Kunden gewinnen und binden. Mehr verkaufen durch innovatives Marketing*, Karlsruhe 2009, 12; Eryk Mistewicz, *Marketing narracyjny. Jak budować historie, które sprzedają*, Gliwice 2011, 81; Eryk Mistewicz, *Czas politycznych najemników*, in: *Uważam Rze* 33 (2011), 96.

focus on the "product" - the Gospel as the best possible "offer" without proper consideration of the state of mind, needs and perceptive capabilities of her recipients.³⁵

By comparing pre-evangelization to marketing, one can give the impression that it is trying to limit human freedom and force faith in the Gospel. It is true that in marketing, communication is about not only a neutral message, but also persuasion.³⁶ In pre-evangelization, however, it has nothing to do with exerting pressure on a person or manipulation understood as a "strategic action" (J. Habermas), in which the purpose justifies the means. Pre-evangelization as a preparation for the direct proclamation of the Gospel is to stimulate people to think and use rational arguments to convince them to become interested in Christianity. Thus, it doesn't violate their freedom, but thanks to the content transmitted to them, it "liberates" their freedom (cf. Jn 8:32), expanding the field of its use and helping them to overcome contingency, that is, uncertainty as to the rightness of decisions made.³⁷

A second argument in favor of maintaining interest for pre-evangelization refers to sociological observations. There are some situations in which it isn't possible to preach the Gospel because it could be immediately rejected. Then the Church's involvement should be orientated toward promotion of the evangelic values which are indeed fully human. The participation of believers in building a civilization of love, and their witness of faith and solidarity aren't the proper evangelization, because it is a pre-kerygmatic period and it is understood as raising the attention of unbelievers. This is done through the spin-off from the attitude formed by the Christian faith, which is expressed in friendship, kindness, works of mercy and love of neighbor. This kind of behavior can be called pre-evangelization or radiating witnesses living faith in Christ.³⁸

Pre-evangelization is also supported by an argument coming from the area of communication, namely, the proposal to develop a framework for understanding and making decisions regarding the acceptance of the Gospel by its recipients. People don't make important existential decisions in an intellectual vacuum. Before the message of salvation reaches the audience, it is necessary to give the listeners an amount of information so that they know the truth about the foundation of the Christian faith and are able to set themselves free from erroneous philosophical and moral concep-

³⁵ Washington Uranga, *Comunicación, Iglesia y sociedad. Visión socio-ecclesiológica de la comunicación*, in: Gianfranco Ravasi – Jim McDonnell – Washington Uranga, *Evangelización y Comunicación*, Caracas 1994, 109–177, here 159.

³⁶ George Barna, *Marketing the Church. What They Never Taught You About Church Growth*, Colorado Springs 1988, 135; Udo Schmälzle, *Bekenntnis zu einer Kirche, die sich unter das Evangelium stellt*, in: Heribert Wahl (ed.), *Den „Sprung nach vorn“ neu wagen. Pastoraltheologie ‚nach‘ dem Konzil. Rückblicke und Ausblicke*, Würzburg 2009, 161–178, hier 168.

³⁷ Herbert Haslinger, *Das Handeln des Menschen zwischen System und Lebenswelt*, in: Herbert Haslinger u.a. (ed.), *Handbuch Praktische Theologie*, vol. 2. *Durchführungen*, Mainz 2000, 185–205, here 192.

³⁸ Gründig, *Mission im Wandel* (An. 25) 68.

tions.³⁹ This is achieved by dialogue with people representing other religions or followers of ideologies.⁴⁰ With regard to evangelization, dialogue is a form of pre-evangelization preparing the audience to receive the message because it allows the awakening of the interest of people for the spiritual dimension of reality, and at the same time to remove barriers from the human heart and mind that prevent acceptance of the Good News of Christ. Above all, dialogue corresponds to the action of God who communicates himself to people, initiating a relationship with them which is based on respect for human dignity and freedom.⁴¹

Pre-evangelization is an important activity in the service of preparation of evangelizers to preach the Good News. So formulated argument concerning the formation of communicators of the Gospel draws their attention to the need to assimilate appropriate language, which will allow preachers of the Gospel to enter into a contact with their addressees, and help their potential audience to obtain a new approach to well-known reality in the light of God's revelation.⁴² If the previous way of life of people, their language, mentality and approach to religion are included in *praeparatio evangelica*, their conversion can be seen as a continuation of the past, and not as a break with it. Thus understood, the phase of pre-evangelization is also challenging for the evangelizers to be able to establish a relationship with non-Christians and act in accordance with the Spirit of Christ working in him. From this point of view, the important role in pre-evangelization involves proximity, seeking contact with people and willingness to listen to them.⁴³

Another important argument in favor of greater interest in pre-evangelization is its historical background. It refers to the practice of the early followers of Christ, for whom the Gospel was always a current message in a dual dimension: the Gospel demands to be proclaimed to others, because this is the will of the risen and living Lord, and it gives shape to their daily existence. The early Church was aware of her mission performed in two ways. First, the presence of the Christian community itself evangelizes her environment. The second way of evangelization is the activity of missionaries who don't only know what they say, but have experienced what they preach.⁴⁴ Their participation in the life of the Christian community makes them credible witnesses of Christ, because where believers live according to the commandment of love, they ex-

³⁹ James W. Cox, *Preaching. A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, Eugene 2002, 10.

⁴⁰ *Ad Gentes* No. 11; O'Collins, *Living Vatican II* (An. 9) 187.

⁴¹ Marcello Zago, *Buddhismo e cristianesimo in dialogo. Situazioni, rapporti, convergenze*, Roma 1985, 162.

⁴² Gallagher, *Hacia una nueva pre-evangelización* (An. 1) 127.

⁴³ Zago, *Buddhismo e cristianesimo in dialogo* (An. 41) 163.

⁴⁴ Klaus Berger, *Die Urchristen. Gründerjahre einer Weltreligion*, München 2008, 120.

perience His presence. It is He who enlightens and empowers them to undertake the mission to bring about the salvation of the world.⁴⁵

The very existence of Christian communities in ancient times was pre-evangelization, through what the environment might find out about the power of the Gospel, which is capable of transforming the lives of individuals and societies. Living in the world but not being of the world, the early Christians formed the shape of the life of the early Church. Her structure was based on the family and home communities whose way of functioning presented an alternative to the social and religious life in the pagan context. All in need of assistance, especially widows, strangers and sick people found support in the Christian communities. Women got respect and could actively participate in the religious life of their communities. Slaves weren't rejected and from the fourth century they could be released by their owners. Since then, enjoying the freedom of religion, Christians could develop social activities, building hospitals, orphanages and shelters for pilgrims. The emphasis wasn't so much put on the action of individuals, as on the pre-evangelizing witness of communities to the Gentiles. Before they heard the Good News, they could "see" the Christian truth in the deeds of the followers of Christ and admire the beauty of the living Gospel.⁴⁶

The activity of Christian thinkers and writers in a form of defense of religious beliefs and practices based on the Gospel against criticism of Gentiles served pre-evangelization.⁴⁷ The aim of their activity was preparation of the way for the Gospel through intellectual reflection, making it possible to recognize the differences between pagan religions and Christianity. In their texts, Christian thinkers presented mistaken interpretations of their adversaries in a sometimes ruthless manner, exposing the low level of morality, culture and religion found in the pagan world.⁴⁸ They urged their readers to reject polytheism, criticizing the ancient myths and their philosophical interpretations. In times of persecution, their texts showed the rationality of Christianity and appealed to the authorities for tolerance. They wrote also apologies due to the acquisition of new followers.⁴⁹

An example of an ancient apologist is a writer, Eusebius of Caesarea. His famous work *Praeparatio evangelica* directly refers to pre-evangelization – the preparation of peo-

⁴⁵ Piero Coda, La presenza di Gesù risorto nella Chiesa, in: Michel Vandeleene (ed.), *Egli è vivo! La presenza del Risorto nella comunità cristiana*, Roma 2006, 89–102, here 100.

⁴⁶ Victor Codina, *El Espíritu del Señor actúa desde abajo*, Maliaño 2015, 76–77; Berger, *Die Urchristen* (An. 44) 121; E. Glenn Hinson, *The Evangelization of the Roman Empire. Identity and Adaptability*, Macon 1981, 34.

⁴⁷ Martin Pable, *Reclaim the Fire. A Parish Guide to Evangelization*, Skokie 2009, 19.

⁴⁸ Antoni Żurek, *Ewangelizacyjny charakter apologii chrześcijańskiej*, in: Franciszek Drączkowski – Jerzy Pałucki (ed.), *Ewangelizacja w epoce patrystycznej*, Lublin 1994, 125–131, here 128.

⁴⁹ Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, San Francisco 2005, 28.

ple interested in Christianity to accept the Gospel.⁵⁰ Due to their recipients, who were pagans and neophytes, he stayed first focused on remodeling the prevailing common forms of thought, in order to introduce later new concepts and issues specific to Christianity.⁵¹ In his work, the starting point was what is more general and easier. Subsequently he went to what is more difficult and more detailed. So he started from what is commonly known: the legends of pagan religions and secular philosophy, cosmology and ethics. He presented mythical gods as evil demons and pagan prophecies as lies and exposed the fatalism typical for pagan oracles. In the next step, he touched specific Christian themes such as the Incarnation of the Eternal Word and the Second Coming of Jesus. His aim was to form Christians so well instructed that they could join the public debate concentrated on philosophical topics. Their knowledge and wisdom of life helped non-Christians searching for the truth to discover the *vera philosophia* in the Christian religion.⁵²

The rule *revertimini ad fontes* promoted by Vatican II, obliges the contemporary Church to follow the first Christians who - especially in times of persecution hindering the direct proclamation of the Gospel - practiced pre-evangelization. Even if it didn't temporarily precede the open proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, it played an important role in the spread of the message of salvation. Missionary activity of the first Christian communities shows that pre-evangelization is closely linked with evangelization, although this first still needs completion in the form of explicit proclamation of the Christian kerygma.

Followers of Christ, living in the third millennium, who want to continue the work of evangelization, find inspiration in the activity of the early Christians to seek new ways of verbal communication of the truth of the Gospel. They are also encouraged to care for faithfulness toward obligations arising from baptism and acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Their active presence in the ancient society reminds today's Church of the possibility, or even of the necessity, to prepare people's hearts through their openness, kindness and generosity practiced toward unbelievers, doubters and enemies of Christianity to receive the Gospel. The pre-evangelizing activity of the first Christian apologists draws attention to the indispensability of intellectual efforts in order to help believers in Christ to expand knowledge of the Christian faith as a way compatible with human nature, and so to make possible for them to reach the fullness of human development.⁵³

⁵⁰ Gianni Criveller, *Dar razón de las cosas de nuestra fe. Géneros literarios y misión jesuita en China al final del periodo Ming*, in: Perla Chinchilla – Antonella Romano (ed.), *Escrituras de la modernidad. Los jesuitas entre culturaretórica y culturacientífica*, México 2008, 207–238, here 207.

⁵¹ Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (An. 49) 64; Jean Sirinelli – Édouard des Places, *Introduction générale*, in: Eusèbe de Césarée, *La préparation évangélique*, Paris 1974, 7–54, here 40–44.

⁵² Żurek, *Ewangelizacyjny charakter apologii chrześcijańskiej* (An 48) 129; Sirinelli, *Places, Introduction générale* (An. 51) 37–38.

⁵³ *Spe Salvi* No. 6.

If evangelization without proclaiming the word of salvation is unthinkable, it means that there is room in the activity of the Church for pre-evangelization. Theological criterion in which is seen the distinction between pre-evangelization and evangelization is mainly a matter of explicit proclamation of the kerygma that is the message of divine redemption. Therefore, it isn't necessary to worry that acts performed in the field of pre-evangelization will be in opposition to the evangelization or regarded as her "inferior" or "secondary" manifestation. The term "pre-evangelization" should be treated with seriousness, without undermining the importance of the activities undertaken in this framework for the Church's mission.

Pre-evangelization and the preparation of the world for the proclamation of the message of salvation is true apostolate.⁵⁴ Although the *promotio humana* doesn't end with the proclamation of Christ's Gospel and evangelization doesn't identify with progress and human advancement, there is a close bond between them. Commitment to the liberation of man, inspired by faith - even if it is included in the pre-evangelization - is part of the evangelizing action of the Church which is involved in the work of liberation of people from sin, death, and their political and social consequences according to God's will.⁵⁵ The presence, testimony and cooperation in the construction of a more human world are indeed factors of the shaping civilization, but their actualization in circumstances demanding testimony of faith contributes to the development of evangelization. On the one hand, the term "pre-evangelization" indicates in this case that it is an action relating in a strict and necessary way to evangelization, or already belonging to it. On the other hand, it has an incomplete nature. In this context, paraphrasing the French biblical scholar Oscar Cullmann teaching about the fulfillment of the kingdom of God in the world, pre-evangelization can be described as "evangelization already and not yet"⁵⁶. This approach to pre-evangelization strengthens the desire to focus on all that in the evangelizing action of the Church goes beyond the explicit, verbal proclamation of the Good News of salvation.

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⁵⁴ Gaudenzio Zambon, *Laicato e tipologie ecclesiali. Ricerca storica sulla „Teologia del laicato“ in Italia alla luce del Vaticano II (1950–1980)*, Roma 1991, 141; Zago, *Buddhismo e cristianesimo in dialogo* (An. 41) 235; Melo, Antonio Alves de, *A evangelização no Brasil. Dimensões teológicas e desafios pastorais. O debate teológico e eclesial (1952–1995)*, Roma 1996, 67.

⁵⁵ Haight, *Christian Community in History* (An. 24) 404; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Nachfolge Jesu und Option für die Armen. Beiträge zur Theologie der Befreiung im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, Fribourg Suisse – Stuttgart 2009, 40; Roland Hardmeier, *Geliebte Welt. Auf dem Weg zu einem neuen missionarischen Paradigma*, Schwarzenfeld 2012, 114.

⁵⁶ Ryszard Hajduk, *Preewangelizacja w pierwszych wiekach chrześcijaństwa*, in: Wiesław Przygoda – Marek Fiałkowski, *Peryferie wiary wyzwaniem dla Kościoła*, Lublin 2015, 41–59, here 58.

The essence of pre-evangelization is to put a foundation under evangelization in the form of direct communication of the Word of God. *Praeparatio evangelica* increases the chance that the efforts of verbal proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ will be fruitful. The better understanding of what bothers the people of today and their deeper desire to reach the fullness of life guarantees greater "absorption" and openness toward Christian truth. In this perspective, pre-evangelization acts as a prophylactic, protecting evangelizers against frustration caused by the lack of successes in the proclamation of the Gospel. The awareness that someone is waiting for the word of salvation can reinforce their zeal to convey the Christian message to all mankind.

Pre-evangelization is the activity of the Church which doesn't require the carrying out of spectacular actions and of implementing original ideas. Preparation of human hearts to accept the Gospel involves all believers in Christ, not excluding anyone from the active participants in this work – the old, or disabled, or young, or uneducated. The consequence of the activity of the Church, aimed at creating an interest in Christianity is not a waiver of any other pastoral activities, including the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ openly. What's more, pre-evangelization is closely linked with evangelization as its preliminary stage and its incomplete form. The raising of pre-evangelization to the rank of evangelization results sometimes in doubts regarding the meaningfulness of using this term, but this fact even more clearly reveals the great importance of this work for the Church's mission in that the proclamation of the Gospel occupies a central place.

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